

Right-wing Democrat takes California governor's office, demands "sacrifice"

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The inauguration speech of right-wing Democrat Jerry Brown, in which he callously boasted of the harshness of his austerity budget and demanded "sacrifice," amounted to a declaration of war by the new governor of California against the state's working population.

In the carefully choreographed ceremony at the California Railroad Museum in Sacramento on Monday, Brown appeared on stage to take the oath of office, placing one hand on the bible while huge screens relayed the scene to a hall packed with Democratic politicians and their entourages.

Brown began his speech by calling the inauguration ceremony "a sacred and special ritual that affirms that the people are in charge." This invocation of democratic sentiments rings especially hollow in light of the recent election, which was characterized by mass abstention from the polls and disaffection from both political parties, especially among young people.

A mere third of the state's voting population voted in favor of either of the big business candidates for governor. Little more than a sixth voted for Brown, who served two terms as governor three decades ago (1975-1983). Only around one in ten young people between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in the election, down from one in five in 2008.

Brown and his challenger, the billionaire Republican former CEO Meg Whitman, dedicated their gubernatorial campaigns to a contest over which candidate was best qualified to impose a brutal austerity budget. The popular will, insofar as it was expressed in the elections at all, was "none of the above."

Brown's inauguration speech was in many ways indistinguishable from the inauguration speech that his Republican opponent would have been given. He made

the standard flattering references to "our soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan" and "our police and correctional officers." He stressed the need to make "tough choices" to address "huge budget deficits." And the speech concluded with the now-obligatory "God bless you."

But Brown's remarks stand out for the peculiar callousness with which he indicated that massive cuts are to be carried out immediately. In his speech, broadcast to millions of impoverished and struggling Californians, Brown announced that he would demand "courage and sacrifice." To explain what he meant, he read from the diary of his great-grandfather, who traveled west from Missouri to settle in California in 1852.

"On the 26th of June, we came to the first sand desert—it was 41 miles. We went there at night and rode 19 hours in it..."

"On the 26th of July, we came to the second large plain—also 40 miles long. Here we lost seven oxen which died of thirst...Thousands of cows, horses and mules were lying about dead..."

"The discarded wagons by the hundreds were driven together and burned. We saw wagons standing that would never be taken out again and more than 1,000 guns that had been broken up. Here on this 40 miles are treasures that can never be taken out again."

The same "courage and sacrifice" would be required of present-day Californians, Brown concluded. In other words, a trail of death, starvation, thirst, toil, loss, suffering, thousands of corpses lying around—this is the program of the Democratic Party for the working class!

Significant cuts are being prepared to programs upon which millions of people rely. Pensions, jobs, public education, public transportation, infrastructure, wages for state employees, and state health care programs are

all on the chopping block. At the same time, increases in taxes and tuition at public universities are also in the offing.

“I must point out that it is far more than waste and inefficiency that we have to take out,” Brown warned. The state “also pays for things that most people want and that are approved only after elected representatives debate their merits and finally vote them into law. They cover the spectrum from universities, parks, health care, prisons, income assistance, tax incentives, environmental protection, firefighting, and much else.”

The state of California faces a budget deficit estimated by the administration of outgoing governor Arnold Schwarzenegger at \$25.4 billion, the combined product of the world economic crisis, financial gimmicks that are now collapsing, and decades of tax breaks for the rich and corporations. Rather than increasing social spending to alleviate the widespread suffering brought about by the economic crisis, governments worldwide have responded to the crisis with still further cuts.

The entire political establishment has thrown its weight behind the proposed cuts. On Wednesday, the Brookings Institution released a report demanding austerity budgets from western states. Mark Muro, a senior fellow and the policy director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at the influential Washington, DC think tank, commented to the press Wednesday that “this is a time when state policymakers must break their bad habits and turn to more responsible budget planning practices that looks in a balanced way at the long-term fit of revenues to spending.” Meanwhile, the Obama administration has made clear that no further federal assistance for states following the now-exhausted “stimulus” bill will be forthcoming.

To justify the unprecedented cuts, Brown invoked at some length what he called the “philosophy of loyalty.” Attributing this philosophy to the American idealist Josiah Royce, Brown described it as “loyalty to the community, to what is larger than our individual needs.” The word “loyalty” appears in Brown’s speech no less than six times.

In the upside-down world of contemporary bourgeois politics, workers who demand decent living conditions for themselves and their families are greedy, disloyal, and unwilling to make the necessary “sacrifice.”

Meanwhile, no such accusations are leveled the super-rich who have amassed untold billions in their personal bank accounts at the expense of everyone else.

Brown’s inauguration speech demonstrates the treacherous role of California’s unions, which gave their full support to Brown during the recent election campaign, knowing that Brown’s promised austerity budget would devastate their memberships.

The Orange County Employees Association, a government employee union whose members are now threatened with deep cuts by the Brown administration, threw a “hot dog” fest outside the state capitol Monday afternoon to celebrate Brown’s inauguration. Union officials promised that Brown would speak, and a podium was erected. Brown arrived, ate a hot dog, and then contemptuously left without speaking, leaving union officials to try to placate the booing crowd.

Brown warned that he would submit to the state legislature a “painful” budget containing his proposed cuts within the next week. Brown is also expected to propose a special election, to be held in May or June, for a statewide referendum on spending cuts and tax increases.

In his speech, Brown exhorted his fellow politicians to “rise above ideology and partisan interest.” This political euphemism translates to an appeal for both big business parties, the Republicans and Democrats, to collaborate in carrying out the proposed cuts.



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